DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 332 390 EC 230 581

TITLE	Adaptive Behavior. Abstract 26. Research & Resources on Special Education.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Handicapped and Gifted Children, Reston, Va.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (ED), Washington, DC. Div. of Innovation and Development.
PUB DATE	Feb 90
CONTRACT	400-84-0010
NOTE	3p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Council for Exceptional Children, Publication Sales, 1920 Association Dr., Reston, VA 22091-1589 ($1.00 each, minimum order of 5 prepaid).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Adaptive Behavior (of Disabled); Behavior Problems; Daily Living Skills; Decision Making; *Disabilities; Elementary Secondary Education; *Eligibility; Intelligence; Research Methodology; *Student Evaluation; *Student Placement

ABSTRACT

The abstract sheet summarizes research reported in "Assessing and Developing the Adaptive Functioning of Handicapped Children and Youth" by Robert H. Bruininks. The research concerned the dimensions of adaptive behavior, its usefulness in placement and eligibility decisions, and differences between ratings of students' adaptive behavior by persons in various roles. The first group of investigations included: a study of the structure of adaptive behavior as a function of age, developmental level, and type of handicap; and an exploration of the relationships between adaptive behavior, maladaptive behavior, and intellectual/academic ability. Synthesis of these and other studies resulted in the following conclusions: (1) the structure of adaptive behavior appears to be represented by one to two dimensions--a large general adaptive behavior factor and a second, relatively small factor, which varies with the particular test used; (2) maladaptive behavior is primarily a two-dimensional construct with social and personal dimensions; and (3) the adaptive behavior construct has minimal overlap or redundancy with the construct of intellectual and academic ability. Other studies found a strong correlation between adaptive behavior and special education placement and a tendency for parents to rate their children higher than teachers. Methodological concerns identified included factor analysis interpretation. Contains two references. (DB)

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RESEARCH & RESOURCES ON SPECIAL EDUCATION

ED332390

ABSTRACT 26
FEBRUARY 1990

ADAPTIVE BEHAVIOR

The construct of adaptive behavior has been used to specify eligibility standards for special programs and services, prescribe individual client treatment plans, design interventions, evaluate programs, and make decisions regarding client discharge or program exit criteria. Although tests to measure adaptive behavior have been developed, they are not all based on a unified definition of what constitutes adaptive behavior, its structure, or its component behaviors. A theoretical model of what behaviors constitute adaptive behavior is needed to guide research and development efforts.

Assessing and Developing the Adaptive Functioning of Handicapped Children and Youth by Robert H. Bruininks, reports on research conducted at the University of Minnesota to clarify the nature and structure of adaptive behavior and to address methodological issues in its assessment. The studies conducted by the project concerned the dimensions of adaptive behavior, its usefulness in placement and eligibility decisions, and differences between ratings of students' adaptive behavior by persons in various roles, e.g., parents and teachers.

STRUCTURE OF ADAPTIVE BEHAVIOR

An individual's level of adaptive behavior is the extent to which he or she meets the standards of personal independence and social responsibility appropriate to his or her age and social group. For purposes of this project and its subjects, adaptive behavior included: taking care of personal needs, exhibiting social competencies, and refraining from problem behaviors. For example, adaptive social skills for elementary-aged students included: saying hello or shaking hands when introduced, and saying please or thank you. Examples of problem behaviors included: hurting oneself or someone else, destroying property, being disruptive, displaying unusual or repetitive habits, or being withdrawn. The first group of investigations included: (a) a study of the structure of adaptive behavior as a function of age, developmental level, and type of handicap, using the *Scales of Independent Behavior* (SIB); and (b) an exploration of the relationships between adaptive behavior, maladaptive behavior, and intellectual/academic ability.

The SIB, which is generally administered through a structured interview with a teacher or parent, measures adaptive and problem behaviors in motor, social and communication, personal living, and community living skills. It contains 14 subscales. Items assess the degree to which an individual can perform a task without help or supervision.

The subjects for the first study were the norming samples for the SIB and two samples of subjects with retardation. The norming samples included 489 preschool children younger than 4; 460 children in early childhood (4 to nearly 8); 496 children in middle childhood (8 to nearly 14); 315 adolescents (14 to nearly 18); and 198 adults 18 and over. The subjects with retardation included 110 children (6 to nearly 14) and 178 adolescents and adults (14 and over).

For study 2, about half of the SIB standardization sample was administered item clusters from the *Woodcock-Johnson Test of Cognitive Abilities*, and some subjects received the *Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Achievement*. In addition, a separate sample provided scores on the *Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scale* (VABS) and the *Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children* (K-ABC). The 556 children from grades 1–8 had served as part of the standardization samples for both instruments. The sample was nationally representative. The VABS domain scores of socialization, daily living skills, and communication were used, as were the three K-ABC indexes of intellectual ability. The scores were analyzed using principal components, cluster, and/or canonical correlational analyses.

The researchers synthesized the results of these studies, combined them with the results of a meta-analysis of studies from the literature, and drew the following conclusions:

1. The structure of adaptive behavior, as measured by available instruments, appears to be represented by one to two dimensions. There is a large general adaptive behavior factor, labeled by various researchers as "functional autonomy," "self-sufficiency," or "independence." A second, relatively small factor, appears to exist but varies with adaptive behavior scales and the developmental characteristics of the samples. The secondary dimensions identified include social responsibility, academic functioning, physical/developmental functioning, and community/vocational functioning. In other words, most tests of adaptive behavior measure a general adaptive behavior factor plus another factor which varies with the particular test used.
2. Maladaptive behavior has been studied less extensively than adaptive behavior. The literature suggests that maladaptive behavior is primarily a two-dimensional construct with social and personal dimensions, corresponding to the extra/intra dimensions frequently used to describe personal adjustment (e.g., extroversion/introversion). For example, maladaptive behavior includes both hurting oneself and hurting others, and being withdrawn or being disruptive.

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3. Adaptive behavior appears to be a unique construct with minimal overlap or redundancy with the construct of intellectual and academic ability. Furthermore, maladaptive behavior appears to represent a separate, distinct construct that is different from adaptive behavior. Thus, both adaptive and maladaptive behavior scales add important information to intelligence and achievement tests in assessing personal competence.

PLACEMENT DECISIONS

Two investigations were conducted regarding the use of adaptive behavior scales in placement decisions. The first investigated the extent to which the SIB predicted the level of special education service received by students in regular education environments or special education settings ranging from part- to full-time. The scales were administered to 199 students, and multiple discriminant function analysis was used to classify students into one of four categories representing the extent of mainstreaming. The combined use of adaptive and maladaptive variables was found to be significantly related to the students' current levels of special education service.

Another investigation examined the extent to which the SIB adaptive and problem behavior indexes could differentially predict intellectual level as defined by school placement. SIB data from 479 subjects who were classified as moderately retarded (TMR), mildly retarded (EMR), or nonhandicapped were analyzed, based on either the combined adaptive/maladaptive indexes or on the adaptive index. The study found that the linear combination of SIB scores accounted for a significant portion of the variance between differential intellectual groups, and correctly classified 76% of the subjects by group membership.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE EVALUATOR

Another series of studies investigated the effects of the rater on adaptive functioning scores of students with handicaps. The first study examined ratings given by teachers and parents of 37 handicapped and 37 nonhandicapped elementary-aged children.

Overall, parents generally rated their children higher than teachers. The results indicated higher agreement among the evaluations of parents and teachers of handicapped children, with less agreement between the parents and teachers of the nonhandicapped sample. Other studies in this series examined differences between ratings given by mothers and fathers, and by teachers and teacher aides.

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

The researchers identified several methodological issues. First, interpreting the factor analysis of adaptive behavior scale items can be confounded by item difficulty factors. Second, the number of adaptive behavior factors identified by different researchers appears to be related to the level of measurement detail (i.e., whether the unit of analysis is individual items, item parcels, or subscales). The subscale level research currently provides the most solid base from which to evaluate the theoretical structure of adaptive behavior. Third, the evaluation of problem or maladaptive behavior should take into account basic prevalence and base rate information. In nationally representative samples, certain behaviors are found to be more prevalent at certain ages, the highest rates are between ages 2 and 11. For example, children between these ages may frequently display minor incidents of disruptive behavior, or they may be withdrawn for short periods of time. It is the severity, not the frequency, of problem behaviors that most clearly differentiates individuals with significant problem or maladaptive behaviors.

Assessing and Developing the Adaptive Functioning of Handicapped Children and Youth. Robert H. Bruininks, Department of Educational Psychology, University of Minnesota. 45 pp. September, 1987. U.S. Department of Education grant no. G008430084. Available approximately August, 1990, for $.85 (microfiche) or $4.00 (hard copy), plus postage, from ERIC Document Reproduction Service, 3900 Wheeler Avenue, Alexandria, VA 22304 (1-800-227-3742). EC number is 222 724. ED number is not yet available.

RELATED REFERENCES

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The ERIC/OSEP Special Project on Interagency Information Dissemination is designed to provide information about research in special education, in particular, research funded by the Division of Innovation and Development, Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education. This product was developed by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Handicapped and Gifted Children under contract No. RI88062007 with the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education. The content, however, does not necessarily reflect the position of the U.S. Department of Education and no official endorsement of these materials should be inferred.

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